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STAT

HEATH MAY JOIN WORLD 'SPY' AGENCY

Daily Telegraph Reporter

MR HEATH, the former Prime Minister, is refusing to comment on reports that he is to take up a £50,000-a-year job as head of a worldwide private intelligence agency.

The agency is being set up by a Dutch-based company, Iris, the International Reporting and Information System Holdings, as a rival to political and economic information gathering State bodies, such as the CIA.

It is understood that Mr Heath is about to sign a contract to be chairman of the supervisory board of Iris. His initial task will be to find directors "of public prominence" to head six subsidiary companies around the world.

One of his principal targets is thought to be Mr Robert McNamara, former president of the World Bank and a former American Defence Secretary.

Failure of CIA

The businessmen behind Iris are convinced that there will be an extensive and lucrative demand from countries and companies for such a service, particularly in the wake of the CIA's failure to detect any significant cause for concern before the revolution in Iran.

Iris plans to employ experienced field agents and to monitor every publication and broadcast in the world for storage and analysis on computers in America.

As befits the nature of such an enterprise, no one was giving very much away yesterday. Mr Heath is staying in New York with friends and has told aides that he has no comment to make on the report.

A spokesman for him said yesterday that Mr Heath had no plans to retire from active politics, and, it is understood, the Iris position was never contemplated as a fulltime appointment.